

THE INSPIRATION OF THE BIBLE

By Alva J. McClain

The following article is the first of a series which will appear from time to time on the general theme of The Message of the Brethren Ministry. Brother McClain has gained wide recognition from his scholarly treatment of the theme upon which he writes in this issue of the magazine. His more full discussions of this important subject have been widely distributed in booklet form.—Editor.

Since a number of highly misleading theories regarding the Inspiration of the Bible have been proposed in our day, several of the more important of these theories should be discussed briefly as an introduction to the general subject.

The **Ordinary Theory** supposes that God influenced the writers of Scriptures only as He influenced other writers such as Browning and Tennyson. This theory degrades inspiration to the level of mere human genius, and therefore may be dismissed at once.

The **Limited Theory** declares that only certain parts of the Bible are inspired; that the Bible is not the Word of God, but only contains the Word of God. This theory is worthless from a practical standpoint, for who would be competent to determine which parts are inspired and which are not?

The **Degrees Theory** argues that some parts of the Bible are more inspired than other parts. This theory is impossible, for truth is not subject to degrees.

The **Dynamic Theory**, very popular in modern religion, says that the material is of God, but the form is of man. Or to put the matter another way, the ideas of the Bible are from God, but the words are of men. This theory is unscientific, ignoring the fact that thoughts cannot be expressed apart from words.

The **Moral Theory** accepts the moral and spiritual teachings of the Bible as inspired, but argues that the Bible is often inaccurate when dealing with the fields of history and science. Such a theory is inconsistent. If the Bible is in error regarding "earthly things," how can we trust the Book when it speaks of "heavenly things?"

As in all other fields of knowledge and investigation, the true doctrine of Biblical inspiration must be formulated upon the basis of evidence. Setting aside therefore the various theories, let us consider the facts. The lines of proof are both numerous and convincing. First, there is the marvelous **unity** of the

Bible, a collection of sixty-six books written by approximately forty different authors living at various times covering a period of sixteen hundred years, dealing with the most difficult and controversial subjects, yet displaying perfect agreement in every detail. Second, there is the Bible's righteous **character**, giving it indeed a right to be called the Good Book. Third, there is its transforming **power**, as evidenced in the lives of men and nations. Fourth, there is its consciousness of **authority**, unparalleled in any merely human book. Fifth, there is its mysterious **indestructibility**, a link which surely binds it to that God who only "hath immortality." Sixth, we have the evidence of **fulfilled prophecy**, a field so vast that whole libraries have been written to deal with it, and which is increasing in content every day. Seventh, there is also the evidence of the Bible's many remarkable **scientific accuracies**, wherein the writers, living in ages when men knew little or nothing about true science, made statements so accurate and far advanced beyond their day that there is no explanation apart from the divine authorship. Eighth, we have the testimony of **Archaeology**, latest of the Biblical sciences, which speaks with but one voice as to the accuracy of the Scriptures. When

taken alone, each of these eight lines of evidence constitutes a powerful argument. But when taken together, they become overwhelming and unanswerable.

The crowning proof of the Inspiration of the Bible, however, is not among those already mentioned. To us who are Christians there is one voice above all, a voice that is final,

the voice of the Son of God loved us and gave Himself for us. What He said, upon any subject whatsoever, is to us the truth. What He thought about the Scriptures, therefore, is what we as Christians must think about the Scriptures, for "the servant is not greater than his Lord." What then did our Lord think about the Scriptures?

First, we discover that He was **perfectly familiar with the Old Testament Scriptures**. An examination of His teachings shows that He was constantly referring to the historical events of the Old Testament, that He was continually quoting from the Old Testament, and that His words are saturated with indirect allusions to Old Testament Scripture.

"HEAVEN AND
EARTH SHALL
PASS AWAY: BUT
MY WORD SHALL
NOT PASS AWAY"
(LUKE 21:33).

He seems to have known the Old Testament as no other person has ever known it, and therefore was perfectly aware of those alleged problems which the modern critics declare, raise serious questions as to its trustworthiness.

Second, always and everywhere Christ assumes that the **Old Testament is from God and therefore final in its authority over the souls of men**, unless changed or qualified by His own words. He begins His ministry with an appeal to Scripture (Lk. 4:16-21), and closes His ministry with an appeal to the same source of authority (Lk. 24:44). During the intervening years He settles all problems by an appeal to Scripture. "Have ye not read?" He demands of the mistaken Sadducees, and points to the source of their blunder as "not knowing the Scriptures" (Matt. 22:29-31). To Him, whatever Moses wrote was the "commandment" and every "Word of God" (Mk. 7:9-13).

Third, we find that Christ **treated the Old Testament prophecies as genuine predictions which must be fulfilled** (Matt. 26:53-54). Many events which had already taken place, He explains as the fulfillment of prophecy (Mk. 14:49, Jn. 13:18). Furthermore taking His stand on Old Testament prophecy, He confidently foretells other events still in the future (Matt. 26:31, 64-65). And finally, He makes it the supreme function of His earthly ministry to fulfill these prophecies which were written in the Old Testament (Matt. 26:24, Jn. 19:28-30).

Fourth, we find our Lord always treating the great miracles of the Old Testament as historical events, never questioning their genuineness. There is no lack of evidence here. In fact, it would almost seem that He deliberately selected and authenticated the very miracles which modern criticism questions or denies. Among the many, consider the following examples: He puts the stamp of His divine approval on the Genesis story of **Creation** (Matt. 19:3-6). Of the Noahic **deluge** He says, "The flood came, and destroyed them all" (Lk. 17:26-27). With reference to the judgment of **Sodom**, He declares that "It rained fire and brimstone and destroyed them all" (Lk. 17:29). Warning men to flee from Jerusalem and not turn back, He says significantly, "Remember **Lot's wife**" (Lk. 17:32). He knew the story of the **burning bush** and accepted its details as true (Lk. 20:37). Of the miracle of the **Manna**, so often questioned today, our Lord said to the Jews, "Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness" (Jn. 6:49). The **brazen serpent** is no myth, for "Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness," He says (Jn. 3:14). According to His testimony, "The **heaven was shut up three years and six months**" in the days of **Elijah**, and **Naaman the Syrian** was cleansed (Lk. 4:25-27). And in the face of all the sceptics, He alleges that "**Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly**," incredible as it

may seem. (Matt. 12:40). Certainly, if the Son of God, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, believed these things, there is no reason why we should not.

Fifth, Christ reveals His own personal and unquestioning faith in Old Testament Scripture by **leaning without reserve upon its statements during the great crises of His life**. During the wilderness temptation, in deadly conflict with the Adversary, He takes refuge three times in quotations from the book of Deuteronomy (Matt. 4:1-10). To appreciate the force of this testimony we should consider what was at stake here—the whole plan of salvation for a lost race. We should also remember that all the resources of the infinite God were at His command. Yet in this crucial hour the Son of God finds His defense and victory in the declarations of an Old Testament book which modern critics have pronounced a forgery!

Sixth, we find furthermore that our Lord **made no distinctions between various parts of the Old Testament**. To Him it was true in all its parts. His quarrel with men was not that they believed too much but too little of the Scriptures. "O fools," He says, "and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken" (Luke 24:25). And again, quoting an obscure passage from a rather obscure Psalm, He reminds His hearers that "The Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:34-35), regardless of where it is found.

Seventh, the very silence of Christ sheds some light on His high estimate of Old Testament Scripture. As much as He knew about the Scriptures, as much as He referred to the **mand** quoted from them, if He had any doubts at all concerning their veracity, could we not reasonably expect to find some trace or intimation of such doubts? But, as every competent scholar knows, there is absolutely nothing of this kind in the gospel records. Can we not therefore quote His own words here, although not originally uttered in this connection, "If it were not so, I would have told you" (John 14:2).

Thus far the testimony of Christ considered has been concerned wholly with the Old Testament. What about the New Testament? Is that also inspired of God? To this question, it might be answered that if our Lord regarded the Old Testament as the very Word of God, certainly He would not attach a lesser value to the writings of the New Testament,

"As apostasy of the professing church becomes more and more apparent, prayer for the revival of the true church should become more and more urgent."

—Thomas E. Stephens.

our enemies themselves being the judges. But we need not speculate about His attitude. Here are the facts: **First**, we find that just before He went to His death, He declared that He was leaving revelation unfinished. "I have yet many things to say unto you," He informs the disciples, "But ye cannot bear them now" (Jn. 16:12). **Second**, He promised that this unfinished Revelation would be completed after His return to the Father. To the sorrowing disciples, who were chosen to be the first heralds of this revelation would be completed after His return to the Father. To the sorrowing disciples, who were chosen to be the first heralds of this revelation and the writers of New Testament Scripture which records it, He says, "When He, the Spirit of truth is come, He will guide you into all the truth" (Jn. 16:13 ARV). **Third**, before any of the New Testament was written, He outlined prophetically the complete content of this Revelation. The Spirit would bring back to their "remembrance" what He had taught while on earth (Jn. 14:26), thus making possible the **gospel** records. He would also take the things of Christ and "shew it unto" these men (Jn. 16:14), thus enabling them to interpret rightly the historical facts in the doctrinal **epistles**. Furthermore, when the Spirit came, He would show them "things to come" (Jn. 16:13), thus accounting for the **prophetic** element in the New Testament, particularly in its final book. Still further, because He knew in advance exactly what these men would speak and write under the influence of the Holy Spirit, Christ gave to their words all the authority of His own (Matt. 10:2, 14-20, Jn. 15:20, 17:18, 20).

If anyone should object that Christ is not competent as a witness to the inspiration of Scripture **before it is written**, we can only reply that to deny this is to deny His deity. We believe that as the Son of God He could predict accurately what would take place in the future, not merely because He possessed prophetic discernment, but also because He had the power to bring to pass what He predicted.

Now our examination of Christ's testimony has been only partial and hasty, but it is sufficient to reveal His estimate of the Bible. To Him all Scripture is the infallible and eternal Word of God, of which not one statement or word can possibly be broken, the final court of Truth beyond which there is no appeal. This is the mind of Christ, according to His recorded testimony. And if we call ourselves Christians, we should be ready to bow to the Apostolic injunction, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5). If we acknowledge Him as Lord, then He must have the right to control our **thinking** as well as our living. For after all, it is **what we think** that determines **how we shall live**. We cannot get our morals from Christ and ignore Him in our theology.

In concluding this paper, one other question

should be discussed at least briefly. What is the **extent** of the Bible's inspiration? Did the control of the Spirit over the writers extend only to the ideas of the Bible, or does it extend to the very words which were used to express the ideas? There is no question at all on this point; **the Bible claims that its words are inspired of God.**

To Moses, writer of the first five books of the Bible, God said, "I will be with thy **mouth** and teach thee what thou shalt **say**" (Exo. 4:12); not "with thy **mind**" to teach thee what to "**think**." And the Psalmist testifies "The Spirit of the Lord spake by me; His was was in my **tongue**" (2 Sam. 23:2); not His "ideas" were in my "brain." Paul, writer of much of the New Testament, claims that he speaks not with "**words** which Man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth" (1 Cor. 2:13). In Gal. 3:16, the same writer rests his whole doctrinal argument on the **singular number** of the word "seed" quoted from Gen. 13:15, a very uncertain foundation if the words of Scripture be not inspired. And according to First Peter 1:10-11 we learn that the writers of the Old Testament actually studied their own writings to find what they meant, a clear indication that the writers were but instruments "**moved**" or swept along" by the Spirit (2 Pet. 1:21).

The testimony of Christ on this point is no less direct, but really goes beyond that of the writers. Facing the Sadducees who denied life beyond the grave, our Lord covers them with confusion by finding the doctrine of life after death in the **present tense** of a **Hebrew verb** quoted from Exodus 3:6 (Matt. 22:23-33). And in the Sermon on the Mount, of which men talk a great deal but seldom study, Christ declares that "Till heaven and earth pass, one **jot** or one **tittle** shall in no wise pass away from the Law, till all be fulfilled" (Matt. 5:18). The "jot" referred to is the Hebrew "yodh", smallest letter of the alphabet, similar in appearance to an English apostrophe; and the "tittle" is one of those little projections which distinguish certain Hebrew consonants from one another, very difficult to see, as more than one theological student could tell you. Thus we see that our Lord not only believed in **verbal** inspiration, but also in **letter** inspiration. And what He believed we need not be ashamed to confess in the face of all the sceptics of this present evil world. Christ knew, what some modern religionists seem to have forgotten, that the Bible is a book composed of **words and letters**. And as Dr. Kyle used to say, if we take away the words, we have nothing left but the paper. Therefore, if we talk about the **Bible** being inspired in any sense whatever, the inspiration must have to do with the **words**, for there is nothing else.

Of course, when we speak of the inspiration of the words of Scripture, we logically mean those words originally written by the writers of the various books. To this it has been objected that the docu-

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ments originally written by these men have perished, and why contend for the inspiration of something that we do not have? (Of course the same question might be asked of those who believe in any other kind of inspiration). But there is an answer. Granted that the original **documents** are lost, we still have today the **words** of those documents preserved for us through copies made before their loss and handed down through other copies. And in so far as we have these original words, we have a verbally inspired Bible today. The whole science of Textual Criticism proceeds upon the assumption of an inspired original, and we cannot too highly honor those godly and competent scholars who with prodigious labor have reproduced the original text by the study and comparison of the ancient manuscripts. Furthermore they assure us that only about one word out of every thousand is in any doubt, and even in such cases no fundamental doctrine of Christian faith is involved. We should be thankful therefore that God has not only given the world a verbally inspired Bible originally, but that He has also marvelously preserved it down through the centuries by His providential control. "Forever, O Lord, Thy Word is settled in heaven" (Psa. 119:89). May it also be settled forever in our own hearts and minds.